

Sermon for September 17, 2017 – 2nd Commandment

Exodus 20:7 (NIV84)

Theme: God's name is His glory.

- 1) Don't misuse His name.
- 2) Use it as He intended.

⁷ *"You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.*

A 1 lb. steel canister of propane can be a very useful item to have. You can use it to fuel a heater, lantern or, if you are like me, a Colman stove for roasting coffee. Yes, when used properly, a 1 lb. tank of propane is a blessing.

Imagine seeing someone using a full propane canister as a makeshift hammer - thoughtlessly pounding nail after nail with it. Is that a wise use of a propane canister? No, such a dangerous misuse could lead to serious injury or even death.

The LORD's name is eternally more powerful and useful than a propane tank. Through it the LORD gives us great comfort, life and salvation. Misusing it, however, is very dangerous. Let us consider these truths under the theme: **God's name is His glory.** 1) *Don't misuse His name.* 2) *Use it as He intended.*

Part One: Don't misuse His name

I don't think any of us would use an open Bible as a coaster for our morning coffee, or a crucifix as a back scratcher. Why not? Because that would be sacrilege: showing disrespect to the God these items represent.

Interestingly enough, the Bible does not call using a cross as a back-scratcher sacrilege, but it does consider misusing the LORD's name as the height of disrespect towards God. Why? Because God's name is his glory. Let me try to explain what I mean.

In the first commandment, God forbade the worship of any image that was supposed to represent him. Why is that? Partly because no image can fully or properly portray him. God's name, however, can do just that: convey to us exactly who he is and what he does.

Think of it this way: if I mention the name, "Aaron Rodgers," you almost immediately think about him, what he has accomplished over the years and what you hope he will accomplish for the Packers in the near future. A person's name carries their reputation. How we use a person's name conveys what we think about them.

The LORD says: *“You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God.”* A more literal translation of this command would be: “Don’t lift up the name of the LORD your God for nothingness”

God’s name is His glory. It conveys his holy and saving reputation. Misusing God’s name, therefore, makes a mockery of who he is: hence God’s stern command not to misuse it.

Well, how does a person misuse God’s name? Luther tells us in the Small Catechism: “do not use his name to curse, swear, lie or deceive, or use witchcraft.”

The first thing Luther mentions is cursing: that is, asking God to bring evil on someone or something. “G D this, G D that”: it seems as if some people can’t get through an hour without cursing someone or something to hell! Does such talk portray the LORD as a loving God, or as petty and vindictive? Is God’s reputation honored by using his name in such a way?

Swearing – that is, false or frivolous promises or oaths – is also a misuse of God’s name. Whenever we take an oath or make a promise in his name, we are calling God as our witness. He is truth personified. Do you really think he will hold anyone guiltless who invokes his name to spread lies or cover up guilt? Do you really think he wants his holy reputation used as a witness to convince someone that some meaningless gossip is true?

Another common misuse of God’s name is using it for no apparent reason. Phrases like: “Oh my God,” “Jeez” (which is short for Jesus), or “for Christ’s sake” are all misuses of God’s name. Now, at first you might think: “What’s the big deal? It’s not as if anyone is getting hurt.” Think about it for a moment: would you like people going around, using your name for no apparent reason at all? Saying: “O, Mike,” “for Mike’s sake” “for the love of Mike. . .” You see, every time we hear our own name, our attention is drawn to the person who says it. The same is true for the LORD: every time his name is used, his attention is grabbed. Now, if you wouldn’t want people using your name all the time for no reason, what makes you think God likes his name being used in such away – especially since he is always alert, ready to listen to the prayers of his people?

Another way God’s name is abused is when it is used to defend fortune telling – like many prominent psychics are inclined to do. In the same vain, teaching false doctrine is probably the worst way a person can dishonor God’s name because, in doing this, you are changing God’s reputation – making him into something he is not.

“You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God.” I know: the world thinks that breaking this commandment isn’t all that serious. But did you ever take a moment to consider why the world thinks this way? It’s because they don’t take the LORD seriously: people don’t truly fear his holiness, power, and anger over sin. They don’t respect him, hence they are all too willing to drag his name in the mud.

But what about you? What does your use of God's name show about your relationship with him? There's a story about a pastor who asked one of his parishioners to stop misusing God's name. The parishioner responded: "Oh, pastor, you have to understand that when I use God's name like that, I don't really mean it." The pastor replied: "That's exactly the problem: "Whenever you use God's name, He wants you to mean it."

Yes, there is no greater form of sacrilege than misusing God's name! This is why He adds a threat to this commandment: *the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name*. God is so serious about his name that he punishes every and all misuses of it. Take a moment to think about what that means for you. I mean, can any of us claim to have gone through life without using God's name frivolously? No, we haven't! We are all guilty before God – deserving of his holy wrath and punishment.

But here's the thing: God does not want us to die apart from him. He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. This is why, instead of punishing us for our sins, the LORD did something remarkable: he sent his one and only Son to take our guilt upon himself, and suffer and die in our place. Yes, even though God does not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name, He nevertheless loved us so much that He sent Jesus to bear our guilt and win our salvation. Why? Because this is who He is: *a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness*. (Psalm 86:15 NIV84).

Yes, the LORD is both righteous and wrathful, merciful and forgiving. He punishes sin and saves the sinner. The LORD wants us to know this about himself. Why? So that, fearing his anger, we may repent of our sins. Then, trusting in his mercy, we can live in the peace of his forgiving love. This is exactly why the LORD has given us his name – not so that it becomes a curse because of our misuse of it – rather that we may receive many blessings as we show proper fear, love and trust in God by the way we use his name.

Part Two: Use it as He intended.

And how does God want us to use his name? Luther tells us in his small Catechism: "call upon God's name in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks."

The LORD wants to be *our* God so that we might know and trust in exactly who he is in order to receive the wonderful forgiveness, life and salvation he won for us on his cross. This is why he bids us to call upon his name in every trouble trusting in his mercy and power to help. Just as there is no problem too great for him, there is also no problem too small. Regardless if you are battling a cold or cancer, call upon God's name in every trouble – yes, even if the trouble is of your own making because of sin. Repent and look to him for forgiveness, for he will hear your prayer, forgive your sin and deliver you in his good and gracious time.

Remembering the mercy and love He shows us in Christ, pray to the LORD on all occasions – committing everything you have and are into his tender care. See his hand in every aspect of your

life and praise him for it. Thank him for all the blessings he gives you day after day: food and drink, a house, home, family, friends, good weather, good government, peace, protection, health, etc. . . Think about how all these are a sign of his underserved love for you.

Having considered all these things, you can continue to honor God's name by telling other people about him. In a world where the LORD is all too often falsely represented, confess the truth about him – the truth you have learned from Scripture itself. This, too, is a most noble use of God's name, for he truly desires that all people be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. But, *how*, as the Scriptures say: *can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?* (Romans 10:14 NIV84) This is why confessing Christ is a most noble use of God's name.

Saying grace at every meal, invoking his name when we get up in the morning and go to bed at night, asking God for mercy whenever we see anything bad, praising and thanking God for every good (no matter how minor), and sharing blessings like “may God bless and keep you” are yet more ways we keep the second commandment – all to the glory of his name.

The LORD also wants to use his name by praying for others – committing our friends, family, community, country – yes, even our enemies – into God's gracious care – asking the LORD to curb all evil, bring the proud to repentance and show his mercy on all.

And, as we do all these things in response to the grace God has shown us in Christ, the LORD will bless us. We will grow in faith – strengthened to face every evil day in the confidence that the LORD will keep his promise to deliver us from every evil attack, bringing us safely home to himself in heaven.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: the LORD's name is more than a mere title, by which we label God. No, the LORD's name is His glory. It conveys to us everything God wants us to know about himself regarding his justice and mercy. His name conveys all the wonderful blessings He has won for us, as we ponder upon his saving reputation.

Yes, God's name most certainly is His glory. Let us then learn to avoid every misuse of his name by using it the way he always intended: for the strengthening of our faith and proclamation of his glory. Amen.